

CANADIANS AT THE MEAT-GRAIN INTERFACE *

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How a man arrives at a decision that will affect his future depends much on the kind of man he is. Economists like to suppose the only legitimate sort of decision-maker is an "economic man," a man who is tirelessly objective and rational in response to a profit motive. But there are certain flaws in such a man that make his existence less likely than it is convenient for economists to suppose. Some of these flaws have been specified by Kenneth Boulding, who wrote:

"No man in his senses would want his daughter to marry an economic man, one who counted every cost and demanded every reward, was never afflicted with mad generosity or uncalculated love, and who never acted out of a sense of inner identity and indeed had no inner identity even if he was occasionally affected by carefully calculated considerations of benevolence or malevolence." (1)

Boulding saw in this convenient but dismal assumption about man a basis for much disenchantment about economics as a science, because such objectivity fails by far to explain the decision-making methods of man, let alone the nature of man himself.

So Boulding describes for us another kind of man, but reminds us he is a non-economic sort of man. He is a man whose existence is based on subscription to some "heroic ethic" in which "the decision-maker elects something, not because of the effects it will have, but because of what he is; that is, how he perceives his own identity." Here is a man whose identity is affected by generosity or love, and whose decisions do reflect

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his innermost needs and hopes. If need by, he is the sort of man who could exhaust himself, and with pride, on a thin and failing little farm. Surveying this warmly heroic man and the coldly economic man Boulding summarizes the two extremes.

"My personal view is that, especially at his present stage of development, man requires both heroic and economic elements ... and the problem of maintaining them in proper balance and tension is one of the major problems of ... the individual and of societies. Economic man is a clod, heroic man is a fool, but somewhere between the clod and the fool, human man, if the expression may be pardoned, steers his tottering way." (1)

Human man, a man somewhere between the economic man who is a clod because he is not heroic and the heroic man who is a fool because he is not economic. The differences between us all could be described by our different positions in the spectrum that spans the two extremes. And all of us, with all our differences in these dimensions populate the agricultural landscape and affect its future. Let us see, now, how we are divided and how we are affecting the outcome of agriculture in the struggle between our economic and our heroic aspirations; our cloddish and our foolish extremes.

I bring all this to your attention because it illustrates a basis for some inconsistencies in your concern about problems at the Meat-Grain Interface. There are inconsistencies, after all, between your identities as Canadians and your motives as businessmen. There always are inconsistencies between social and economic considerations. The only thing remarkable at all is their particular character in a particular setting, and I have chosen to remark on them in the context of Canadians at the Meat-Grain Interface.

Yes, there are conflicts. And sometimes they are brought to view in surprising ways. Recall the performance of Charles DeGaulle during his Canadian visit when he offered French endorsement for a separatist Quebec. Even on the U. S. side of the border this extraordinary conduct was regarded as uncommonly graceless behavior. But what Charles DeGaulle was doing was

pointing out the commonality of culture shared by France and Quebec, and he was entirely accurate. What caused resentment was the audacity with which he meddled in the political affairs of a sovereign nation. Hence, the political idea of nationality can conflict with the social concept of culture. Canadians are proud of their nationality and they do not like outsiders tampering with their national identity, and very soon I am going to demonstrate this to you in this audience.

I recall another illustration of the conflict between political identity and social and economic ideas. I attended a purebred cattle sale in southern Alberta several years ago. The prices were impressive, but the attendance was even more impressive. Everybody who was anybody in the Charolais business was there; and I mean everybody from Edmonton to El Paso, and everybody from the Rocky Mountains to the Midwest. They were all friends; brothers-in-the-bond; they all knew each other and there were no state or provincial or international boundaries. There was only sameness. There was no such thing as Alberta or Montana or Texas. There was no Canada, either, and no United States and no France. Heroic considerations like nationality were buried entirely under the overwhelming economic interest in (French) Charolais cattle. An entire society, a heroic culture, a brotherhood, was represented there, built upon the minds and hearts of the cattle industry.

Go East from western Alberta and Montana and you find another agricultural culture that spans the international boundary. It is the small-grain and oilseed industry. It is the heart of National Farmers Union country, and NFU membership is widespread on both sides of the border. There is more difference between those cattlemen and those NFU members East and West than there is difference between Canadians and Americans within those cultures North and South. And those grain producers and cattle-

men do not have widely different attitudes because someone is right and someone else is wrong. They have different attitudes because they have different problems.

When you think about it, the economic similarities between the United States and Canada are so great that the conflict between Canadian economics and Canadian politics is severely tested. Canadian concern about U. S. economic influence is a favored national preoccupation. Canadians fret about U. S. domination. They call themselves the 51st state. Moreover, Canadians in the Prairies Provinces complain that they are held in colonial bondage by the big Eastern provinces. Surely life must be uncommonly difficult when you cannot identify your difficulties. But the truth for us all probably was identified by the comic strip character, Pogo, who said, "We has met the enemy and he is us."

So on any one visit up here I may find you're the 51st state and want border protections and to hell with Americans, and on the next visit you want more free trade with the U. S. and Canada be damned. There really is a great conflict between economics and politics in Canada. It is perhaps too true that if you really do want free trade with the U. S. you do run some long-range risks with your Canadian identity.

Now for sheer audacity I am about to outdo Charles DeGaulle. If you recall DeGaulle you doubt this can be done. But I will try, nevertheless.

Why don't we just pull the string out of the fabric; this artificial nonsense about an international boundary between two countries? Let's make one country out of it. It makes good economic sense. It makes good political sense, too. Instead of just sitting up here fussing about the U.S. you could be down there in Washington doing something about it.

Does all this sound appalling to you? Well, come now, consider it. You wouldn't be a 51st state. You'd be at least one state for each province,

and each territory would be a potential state. For that matter, you could propose as many states as you want, and you would get good representation. You have 10 percent the population of the U. S. That means in Congress you would have 10 percent of the House of Representatives. Even better, each state gets two senators regardless of population and, with 10 states, you could have 20 percent of the Senate. You would have tremendous political clout compared to none if you were inside the United States instead of out of it. With representation like that, and with similar agricultural interests in a lot of low-population western states sharing your views, you probably would get a lot better hearing in Washington than you have ever had in Ottawa.

While we're at it, let's reconstruct the British Empire. It was perhaps the greatest accomplishment in the political history of mankind. Let's get all the Commonwealth Countries back together under one government. The idea of many sovereign nations in today's small world is obsolete anyway. Let's get England and Australia and New Zealand and Canada and all the rest and make one big nation out of it; put it all back together again. Just shift the headquarters from London to Washington. Probably scare hell out of the Russians.

There, now, I've gone and out-done Charles DeGaulle; and with a better plan, too.

Now let me see your hands. All of you in favor of this idea please raise your hands. Nobody? One? Two? What is wrong? Is there an error in my plan?

Well do this for me: All of you who feel a slow burn inside, feel offense, resentment, even a little, because an American suggests you quit being Canada and join the United States--all of you who feel that way, would you please raise your hands?

Well now! Quite a show of hands. Quite a lack of it, too. I judge you are being kind to me; gracious hosts. But I also judge you like Canada. You like the notion of preserving a nation called Canada. You care for your Canadian identity. I like to see those hands in the air. I like it for two reasons: One is that I like the notion of a nation called Canada, too. I'm enthusiastic about it. I like it even from a selfish American viewpoint. Canada is the best neighbor any country in the world could hope to have, and the United States is very fortunate to have a neighbor like Canada. But I like to see those hands in the air for another reason, too. Since I can now suppose that you do like Canada I can begin to make some progress with this difficulty at the Meat-Grain Interface.

If you like the notion of a nation named Canada and you want to keep it in one piece then I think you have a troublesome job on your hands and I want to summarize some reasons why I think this is true:

(1) One of the great and thoughtful authors and observers of the American historical scene and the progress of American development was a Harvard professor of journalism named Bernard DeVoto. In one of his books he made what I thought was a remarkably insightful observation; he commented on how fortunate the United States was that its political, its economic, and its geographic boundaries were all the same (2). It was very conducive, he pointed out, to national unity, and he illustrated this advantage by comparing the United States to less fortunate countries obliged to labor under the burden of disparate geographic, economic and political boundaries.

Canada is one of those countries less fortunate than the United States in this respect. Political, geographic and economic boundaries do not neatly coincide. This causes problems. The problems corrode the national identity and erode the national unity.

(2) There is not the sense of national unity in Canada that there is in the United States. Canada is an idea and an argument debated north of lakes Erie and Ontario, and surrounded by a loose confederation of thinly-populated provinces. The United States has 50 states and it is taken for granted in each state that there is a union; that they are unified, and that the bond is meaningful and the bond will hold. Nobody in the world would dare be offensive to any one state without offending the other 49. Nobody can stake out even one remote Aleutian Island without having folks as far away as Arkansas or Alabama ready to fight about it. In contrast, in this loose confederation of provinces called Canada each province is very aware of its identity as a province and very willing to advocate the welfare of that province even at the expense, if necessary, of the other provinces. Here in the prairie provinces you constantly confirm the truth of this by your consistent desire for more trade with the states and your abiding suspicion that you are exploited by other provinces in the East. There is no place in the United States--no section and no state--that ever conveys such ill-will toward another state as southern Alberta repeatedly conveys toward Quebec. Yet I strongly suspect that if you in the West would listen to what Quebec is saying, if you would hear the substance of its complaint, you would find in that message more to like than to dislike; the substance of complaint in Quebec, it seems to me, an outsider, is much the same as the substance of complaints in the West.

(Even northern and southern Alberta are divided. You have heard Calgary has a new zoo. They put a fence around Edmonton.) Even in this series of conferences the primary object of the gathering from the prairie provinces is to argue the issues that divide you.

(3) There is a third difficulty in the matter of keeping Canada together. Generally, there is much similarity on each side of the border. Per capita income is about the same, consumption habits are much the same;

lifestyles are the same; the monetary system is the same; government is quite similar; the credit cards in your pocket or mine would serve about as well on either side of the border. But because everything is the same on a per capita basis, everything is 10 times larger on the U. S. side of the border because population is 10 times larger. Consequently, Canadians are extremely well informed about what's going on in the United States but U. S. citizens are almost totally ignorant about what goes on in Canada. It occurs to me that this is true for two reasons. (a) The first is that everyone--individuals and societies--in their concern for their survival, need to be informed about what's going on that could affect their future, the circumstances surrounding their survival. In Canada you need to know what goes on in the U. S. because almost anything the U. S. economy does will affect the Canadian economy. It is ten times larger. But about the only thing Canada does to affect the U. S. economy is blow cold air at it. So, all that most Americans know about Canada is that's where cold weather comes from. They think it's full of trees and everybody shoots a moose for breakfast. An Alberta friend of mine was in South Carolina last summer. He took his car to a garage and the mechanics gathered round. They were curious about the umbilical cord hanging out of the grill. After it was explained they asked him if many Canadians owned cars. When he said yes they asked him what they did with them. (All trees, you see, no roads; moose for breakfast every morning.) (b) A second reason why Canadians know the U. S. and the U. S. doesn't know Canada is because both educational systems in both countries, from grade one through college, use American textbooks--full of American illustrations and American data and American examples. There is no way that an educated Canadian can avoid an understanding of the United States.

And by the same token there is almost no way an educated American can avoid ignorance about Canada. So American ignorance about Canada is embarrassing, and it is frustrating, and it is a legitimate basis for genuine Canadian resentment toward the United States. But, if not excusable, the ignorance is understandable.

Now what is important is the punchline in this observation. It relates to your difficulties about keeping Canada in one piece. While Canadians understand the States, and Americans understand the States, who understands Canada? Americans don't. But the point is, neither do Canadians. The whole educational system has been devoted to educating everyone about the United States. Consequently, Canadians are not nearly as well informed about Canada as Americans are informed about the United States. If you care about a unified Canada perhaps you might work a bit harder learning how it works and what it takes.

I don't think you can afford the luxury of taking potshots at Canadians who speak French. I don't think you can afford the luxury of fretting about colonial bondage to Eastern provinces. I don't think you can afford the luxury of accounting your trade with States only in dollars. I don't think you can afford the luxury of resisting rail line abandonment; you can afford nothing less than first-class freight systems. I don't think you can afford the luxury of throwing rocks at each other about Crowsnest Rates. Not if you really care about a viable, unified Canada in a very competitive international environment.

(4) I think there is a fourth difficulty you face in preserving and nourishing Canada (Slide 1). A map of Canada gives a very distorted, very misleading notion of what Canada is all about. The map shows a huge piece of real estate; more square miles than all 50 states. But that is such an unimportant piece of information that anyone who attaches any importance

COMPARATIVE SIZE OF UNITED STATES AND CANADA IN LAND AREA,

APRIL 1970



to it has allowed his mind to be diverted completely from facts of Canadian survival that are critically important. Remember, your political, economic, and geographic boundaries are not the same. What counts is where the people and the action are. And where are they? Compared to the geographic magnitude of the country, everything that counts is all packed down along the southern edge, next to the U. S. border. As the moon is held by the gravity of earth, or iron filings are held by a magnet, so the Canadian economy is clutched by the gravity of the immensely larger economy below the border.

Hence we need look again at our maps of North America (Slide 2). Here is a computerized map of the United States based on states each allotted an area exactly proportional to their population. The map is proportionally accurate to within one-tenth of one percent. It is prepared by the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services. Notice how our minds are suddenly obliged to reconsider our understanding of the United States.

How might such a map cause us to reconsider Canada? It would remind us, for example, that only one-fourth of one percent of Canadian population is found in the vastness of the territories. There are only 53,000 people in all that space and its area would be reduced to a mere speck in a map like this. Moreover, such a map would remind us that Canadian population is only 10.6 percent the population of the United States. Let's hesitate no longer. Let's have a look at such a map. (Table 1, Slide 3)

Here is a map of the United States and Canada in proportion to their respective populations. British Columbia is about the size of Oregon, or Iowa, or Mississippi. Alberta is the size of Arizona. Saskatchewan is equal to Rhode Island. Manitoba compares to Maine. Ontario is twice the size of Maryland. It is the largest province and contains nearly 36%

UNITED STATES PROPORTIONATE TO POPULATION, APRIL 1, 1970

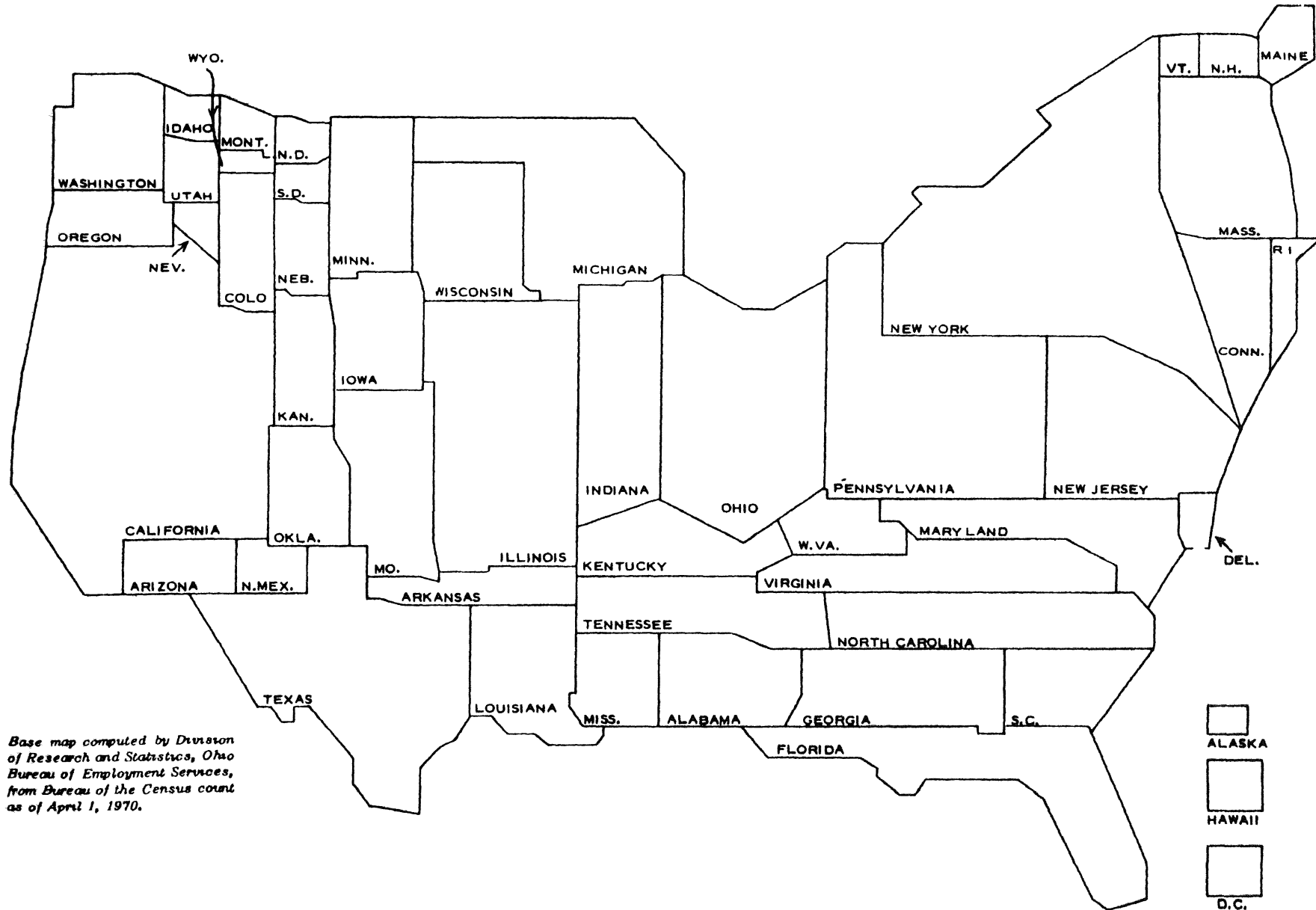


Table 1: Canadian Population, Percentage Distribution and Population by Provinces and Territories, U. S. States of Approximate Equal Population, and Canadian Population as a Percent of United States Population, Census, 1970.

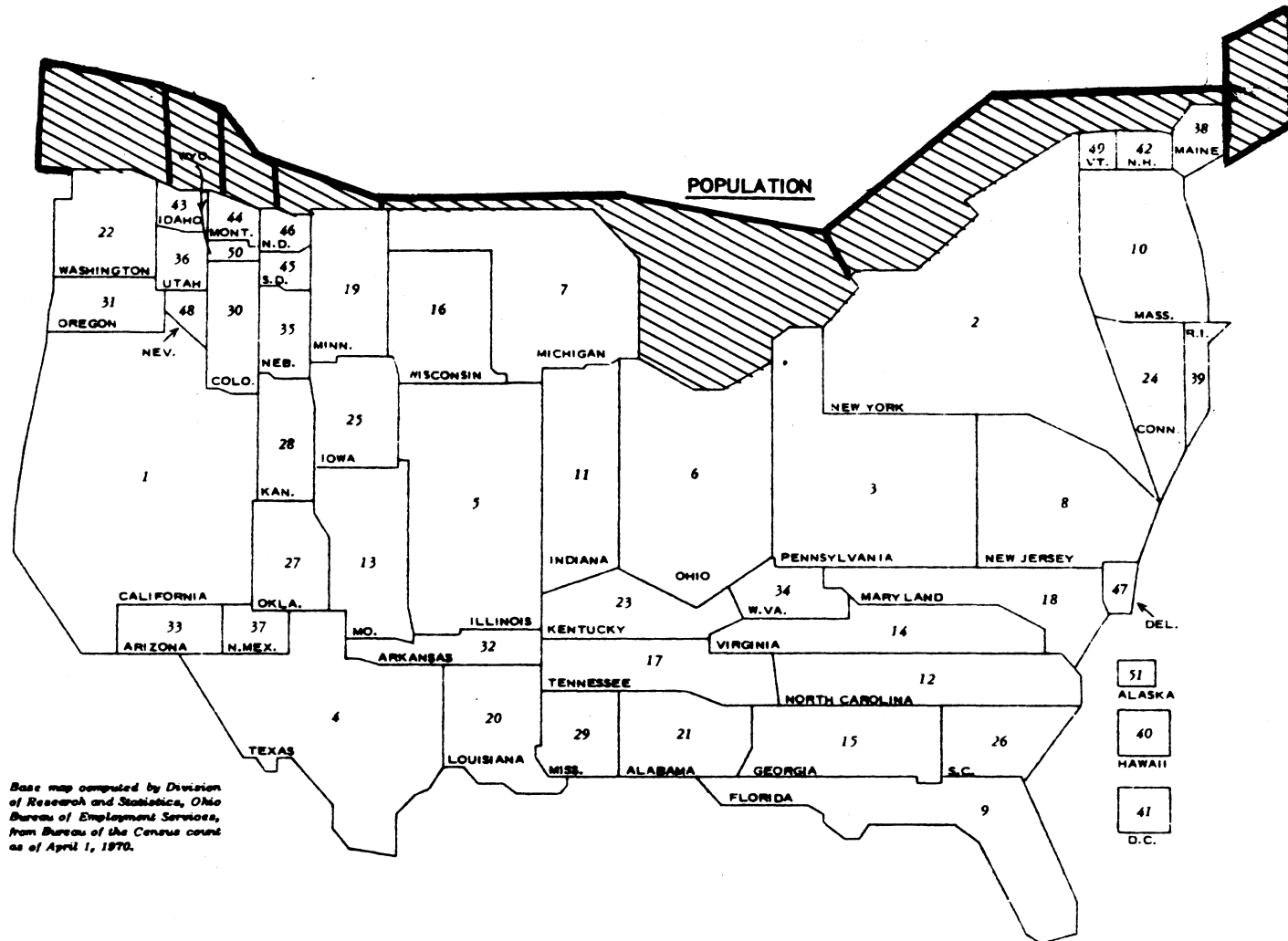
Province or Territory	Canadian Population		States of Comparable Population
	Number	Percent	
All Maritimes ^{a/}	2,057,262	9.54	Colorado
Quebec	6,027,764	27.95	Connecticut x 2
Ontario	7,703,106	35.71	Maryland x 2
Manitoba	988,247	4.58	Maine
Saskatchewan	926,242	4.29	Rhode Island
Alberta	1,627,874	7.55	Arizona
British Columbia	2,184,621	10.13	Oregon, Iowa, Mississippi
Territories ^{b/}	53,195	0.25	--
Canada	21,568,311	100.00	As percent of total U. S. - 10.62 pct.

^{a/} Combines New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

^{b/} Combines Yukon and Northwest Territories

Source: Based on Census data as found in Rand McNally Road Atlas, 52nd Annual Edition, Rand McNally and Co., Chicago, 1976.

UNITED STATES AND CANADA PROPORTIONATE TO POPULATION, 1970



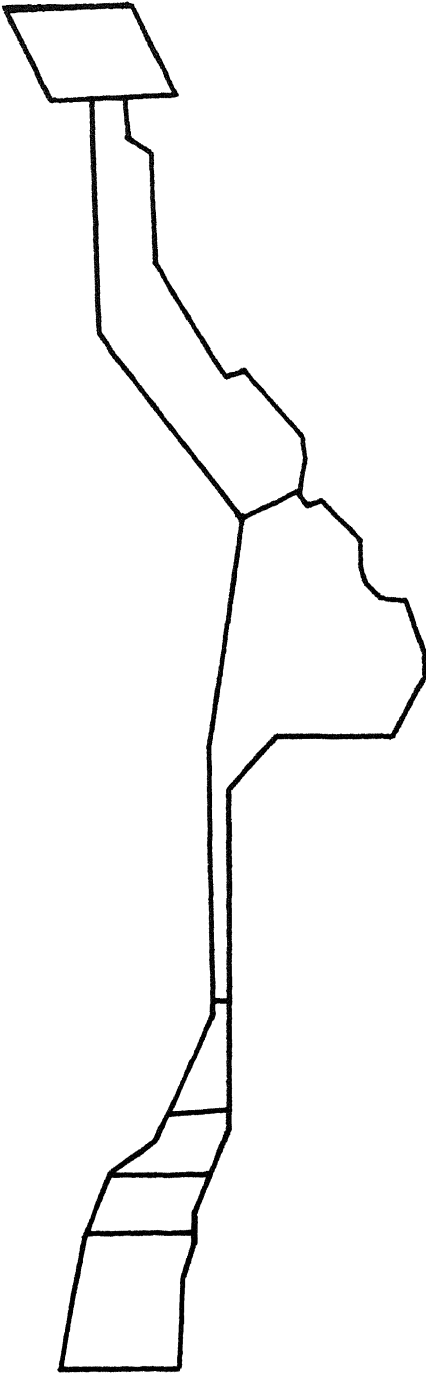
of your population. Quebec is second-largest with nearly 30% of the nation's population. It is about twice the size of Connecticut. All the Maritimes combined are about equal in size to Colorado.

So if you draw a line around the bulk of Canadian people, and perhaps the money as well, the map of Canada shows a country that looks like a lone green bean stretched along the north side of the U. S. border (Slide 4) Canada is an East-West country. You cannot have a political system without an economic system to support it. An East-West political identity requires East-West economic activity to sustain it.

(5) There is yet another difficulty. The long, thin, East-West shape of Canada is not of one piece. The green bean is sliced in many parts. It is sliced by geography, by climate, by culture and, consequently, even by politics. Consider the East-West continuity of Canada or, rather, the lack of it. It is broken once by the Rocky Mountains. British Columbia shares little in common with the prairie provinces. It is broken again, and broken soundly, where the tree-line crosses the international boundary. This happens not too far east of Winnipeg. I think of the tree-line as a sort of constant-climate line; it is the edge of agriculture and the beginning of grim wilderness, particularly in winter months. It extends diagonally southeast across the continent, bisecting the boundary and cutting through the upper peninsula of Michigan and then on across Ontario. It cuts the prairie provinces off from anything to the east. It sharply defines the eastern edge of the West. Through the Lake Superior country the vastness of Canada, East and West, is held together through hundreds of miles of wilderness by the thinnest of economic strands; of railway and highway and airlines and shipping and communication cable. Further east Canada is cut again by the cultural uniqueness of Quebec, and to the east of Quebec there is another barrier created partly by distinctive cultural

Slide 4

**CANADA PROPORTIONATE TO POPULATION
APRIL 1970**



differences in Quebec and the Maritimes and partly by the saltwater itself. It looks like this (Slide 5).

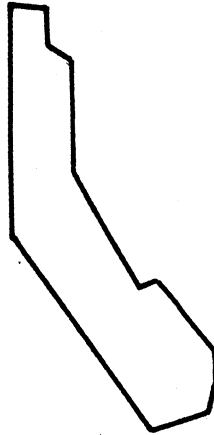
To have unity at all, because of where the people live, Canada is an East-West country. But maintaining that East-West unity is not without expense.

(6) In such a setting I see that Crow Rates serve an ancient, clever, entirely objective, and clearly rational purpose; they induce East-West trade; they align economic activity to the support of a political idea you have already told me you want to preserve. Given the gravitational pull of the U. S. economy, North-South trade is natural, and much of it occurs, but perhaps it carries with it the ultimately unaffordable political cost of lost national identity. I am led by such thoughts to observe again that if you want more trade, and yet want the preservation of Canada, then let Americans ask for the trade and let Canada yield it cautiously (on condition that Canadians be granted proportional voice in the political process, perhaps). It is better, for example, that the U. S. propose a customs union, as has been suggested for beef.

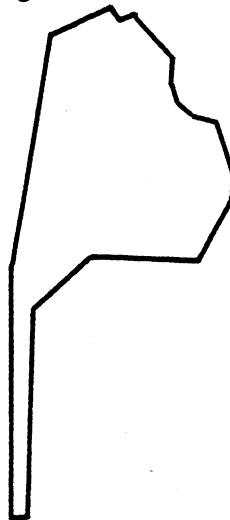
To further encourage that cumbersome and unnatural East-West trade pattern of Canadian commerce, certain tariff and non-tariff restrictions exist at the border. Sometimes you chaffe at the apparent unreasonableness of U. S. border restrictions that prevent a freer North-South trade. It is reasonable to suppose that however senseless some barriers may seem, there are people in the States who think they serve a useful purpose. But let me suggest something that might not have occurred to you: Don't you suppose there are people in Ottawa also who think those U. S. border barriers serve a very useful purpose? Surely there would have to be, however unspecified or unidentified they may remain. Anyone devoted to the political preservation of Canada, and aware that an East-West



CULTURE



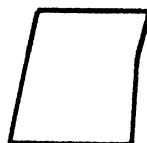
CULTURE



TREE LINE



ROCKY MOUNTAINS



trade flow supports that devotion, would be quietly content that devices exist which dampen the constant temptation for more North-South trade, all of which further damages the East-West unity of Canada (Slide 6).

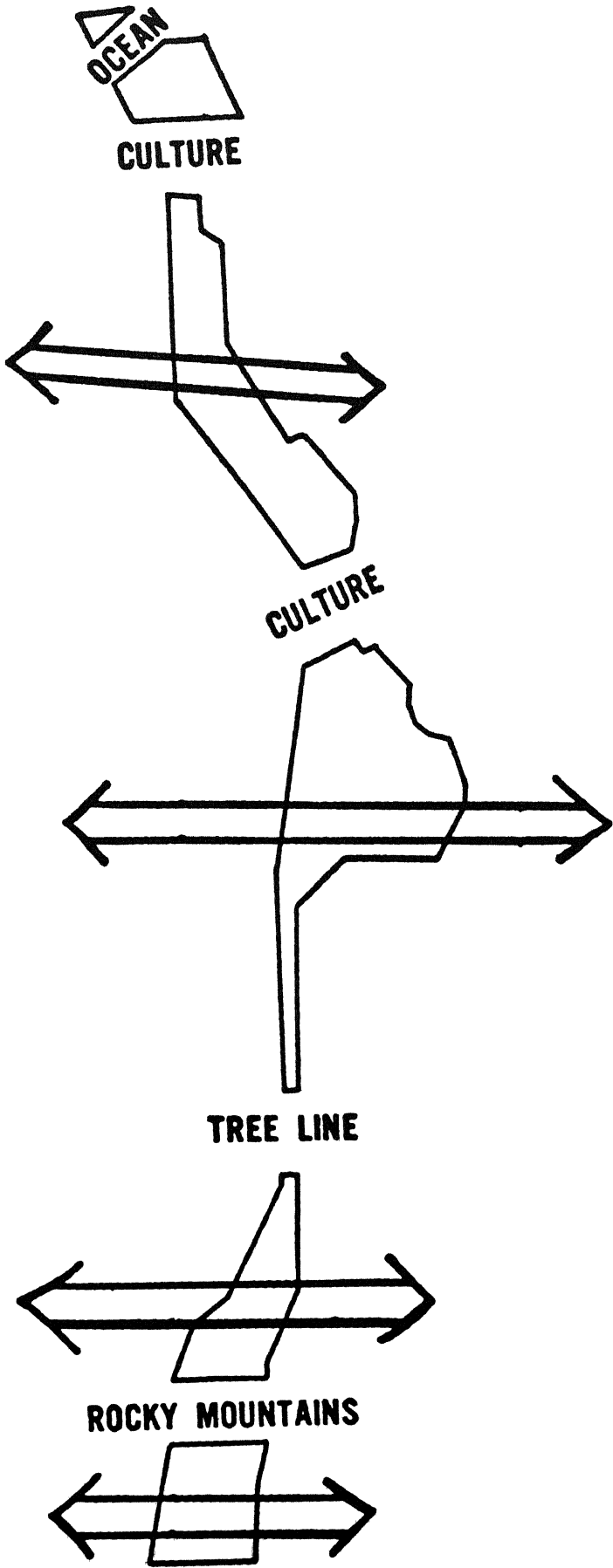
So, yes, we can readily agree that Crow Rates create a problem at the Meat-Grain Interface: They make prairie grain prices artificially high and, without comparable consideration elsewhere, they make livestock prices comparatively low; and feeding in the West becomes less attractive than feeding in the East. So everything moves East. In return you get agricultural supplies, farm machinery and other finished products shipped back West to you.

It is an ancient economic idea. It is called Mercantilism. It fostered the Age of Discovery. It was the economic rationale for centuries of worldwide colonialism: import raw products from the colonies, discourage colonial industry, and ship finished products back to the colonies. The consequence was a favorable balance of trade and the accumulation of wealth at the heart of the Empire. But the point is this: There is an empire!

Yes, the prairie provinces are colonies. Yes, East-West trade is an economic oddity. But these are political priorities enhancing political unity. You may perhaps want to re-examine these economic devices, but remember to account the costs of change in an arena broader than the marketplace.

So, your problems at the Meat-Grain Interface in the prairie provinces are really not Canadian problems at all. In the name of Canada, which you assure me is a paramount consideration, the problem is maintaining the political and economic integrity of Canada. And one solution to that problem is legislated freight rates. In this larger and more important perspective, the solution creates a troublesome inconvenience in the prairie provinces. But the difficulties at the Meat-Grain Interface are the consequence of something larger. They are a measure of the economic

Slide 6



NORTH-SOUTH ECONOMIC TRADE

price that is paid for the purpose of sustaining a political preference so important that it is paramount.

Sometimes I have to concede that I am aging, after all: An example is that I can remember the early and mid-fifties with a clarity that makes me suppose those were recent years. Do you remember when a Farmall M was a real tractor and a Super MD was just about the biggest thing around? It seemed like most people were aware that some sort of big change was supposed to be coming to agriculture, but they all thought it meant Super M's had replaced horses and something else would replace the M's and if that was all there'd be to it, then it was nothing to cause alarm. Seemed like most people had fairly decent farms and if they didn't they weren't too worried about their prospects. They had a couple cows and a couple sows, and they all had names and they all were pets. Here in these prairie provinces there were millions of miles of fencewire containing a mixed agriculture, and there was less power, and more independence, and no weeds between the railroad ties, and the elevators stood square and sturdy.

But technological change came upon us in post-World War II agriculture with unexpected swiftness. Its demands of cost and complexity translated quickly into efficiency related to size. Bigger equipment, for example, could be kept efficiently occupied only over greater acreage. Two things occurred: A few buyers consolidated larger farms from many sellers, and agricultural specialization began to replace the crop rotation of Farmall M agriculture. Saskatchewan tore out a lot of posts and barbwire.

Perhaps the greatest uncertainty faced in agriculture is the uncertainty of price change. With the advent of crop specialization, the

cost of this uncertainty rose dramatically for individual farmers, and the increasing size and complexity of ever-more sophisticated technology drove up the price of risk as well, as competitors struggled to lower their unit costs with huge investments in newer, more demanding methods. In time the price of remaining an economic man in agriculture was beyond the reach of most and beyond the inclination of many.

Agriculture quickly began to lose any unifying qualities of brotherhood it might once have had and soon became characterized by new dimensions of divisiveness as heroic men and economic men began to choose up sides. Social and political unity became eroded. Agricultural specialization soon meant that one man's income became his neighbor's costs when one raised grain and another fed cattle. Some ventured forth into the increasingly frightening future; some sought refuge in the eroding certainty of a traditional pace and life (4).

Today, agriculture is economically and politically a small, remote and fragmented consideration in the view of a vast urban majority that is unable to gain a clear understanding of agriculture and its problems from the babel of contradictory agricultural spokesmen. By default, a divided agriculture is forfeiting its opportunity for an effective political voice in its own destiny, and our problems are resolved for us by City People who are not without concern for their own preoccupations.

The divisiveness that is harbored in agriculture bespeaks a fundamental problem that transcends any small forecasts for your immediate future. Most of us have a regard for agriculture that is greater than a respect for what it can do; we like it also for what it is. We identify with the identity of it. It must be that the economic and heroic differences among us are related to our regard for agriculture and our regard for country

in their varying capacities for what they can do for us as opposed to what we are prepared to do for them.

But the future is the same for all of us and for agriculture. Our problems lie not with a future we cannot understand but with a future we understand all too well. Our problems lie in being willing to do what we know we must do.^{1/}

In some of his writings Marshall McLuhan has left an indelible sentence:

"Whenever technology makes old eras obsolete we always raise them to an art form" (3).

It is possible, therefore, even for men to become technologically obsolete, and they are left with no choice for their own survival but the preservation of their own identity; their self-perception of who they are. To raise an obsolete old era to an "art form" means no more and no less than to preserve obsolete economies in order to preserve obsolete self-identities, long after the prospects for economic profit have grown dim and disappeared--for there is no other identity left to preserve.

Yet always, in the final analysis, when we are driven to the basics of survival, the heroic fool is obliged to yield to the economic clod, who will prevail, for his ally is the broad, relentless sweep of economic forces. We are driven by unyielding necessity to mourn the passing of the heroic fool. We are left with no choice but to acknowledge the arrival of the economic clod.

And to cry.

Or to rejoice.

^{1/} The phrasing of this thought, and perhaps the thought itself, is prompted by recollection of a Peter Marshall sermon recorded by Caedmon Records, TCR 101, and copyright in 1955 by Catherine Marshall.

According to who we are.

And each of us stands somewhere, a human, between the clod and the fool. And may all of us, Canadian and American, by human wisdom be saved from our cloddish and our foolish extremes.

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